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CIA/RR CB 64-72
November 1964

Copy No. 221

INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

NORTH VIETNAM CONTINUES
TO CONSTRUCT BRIDGES TO THE BORDER

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
Office of Research and Reports

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NORTH VIETNAM CONTINUES
TO CONSTRUCT BRIDGES TO THE BORDER

The North Vietnamese at present are engaged in an extensive program to construct new bridges on important roads within North Vietnam that lead to central and southern Laos and through Laos to South Vietnam. Emphasis has been placed on (1) constructing new bridges at points where streams are crossed by fords or ferries and on (2) replacing low-capacity wooden bridges with bridges constructed with reinforced concrete. There is no evidence of a current major effort to improve roads on the Laotian side of the border, but improvement of the road network in North Vietnam will facilitate the movement to the border of men and supplies destined for Communist forces in Laos and for infiltration into South Vietnam.

1. Scope and Significance of Construction

Aerial photography reveals that during the past year the North Vietnamese have carried out a sustained program to construct bridges on routes 7 and 12 in North Vietnam -- the two most important roads used by the Communists to transport men and supplies to the Plaine des Jarres in central Laos and to Communist forces in southern Laos. The North Vietnamese have carried out maintenance of routes 7 and 12 for a number of years, but the current program is aimed at substantially improving the sections of these 2 routes that lie near the border (see the map, Figure 1).

Although the North Vietnamese have publicized construction of bridges located in other parts of the country, they have never openly discussed their construction program on routes 7 and 12. Photography indicates, however, that the present effort to build bridges on these routes was launched sometime in 1963, with actual work on many of the bridges starting early in 1964 following the termination of the 1963 rainy season.* Construction continued through the 1964 rainy season, suggesting that the North Vietnamese place high priority on completion of the work. The bridge construction program in North Vietnam appears to be motivated primarily by military considerations and probably is part of a longer range plan to facilitate access to Laos throughout the year. Mostly during

* The period of most pronounced rainfall in the central and southern parts of North Vietnam is during September and October.

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the dry seasons have large numbers of trucks moved over routes 7 and 12 to supply men and materials to Communist forces in Laos. Once increased trafficability of the routes has been insured to the border, it is possible that greater effort will be applied to stepping up maintenance and repair of the roads within Laos.

a. Construction of Bridges on Route 7

Photographic coverage of route 7 -- the only important route in North Vietnam that leads to the Plaine des Jarres -- reveals that at least eight bridges either have been recently completed or are at present under construction. All of the bridges are located along a 50-kilometer (km) section of the road running between Cua Rao in North Vietnam and the Laotian border. The bridges are concrete deck-type structures, and they range in length from 15 to 60 meters. All of the bridges are constructed over feeder streams that flow into the Nam Mo River, a large stream that parallels route 7 in the border area (see the photograph, Figure 2).

b. Construction of Bridges on Route 12

Photographic coverage of route 12 -- the main supply route in North Vietnam leading to southern Laos -- reveals that seven bridges either have been completed recently or are still being built. The bridges are constructed along a 75-km section of the road running between Loc Yen in North Vietnam and the Laotian border. Two of the bridges are north of Bai Duc Thon -- the staging area which was used for the shipment of men and supplies into Laos during the 1963-64 dry season but which recently has been largely dismantled -- and five bridges are located between Bai Duc Thon and the border (see the photograph, Figure 3). Most of the bridges are between 30 and 60 meters in length and are the same type of structures as those being built on route 7. One bridge near Bai Duc Thon, however, has a steel superstructure and is a combination rail and road bridge. (See the photograph, Figure 4).

2. Other Construction

a. Roads

In addition to the bridge construction program on routes 7 and 12, the North Vietnamese are engaged in a limited program to improve route 1, the coastal road leading directly to the demilitarized zone. No construction has been started to bridge the major water barriers on

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route 1 near Vinh or Dong Hoi, but work is presently underway on two smaller bridges in the area. One of these is located near Kiem Tam, approximately 80 km north of Vinh, and the other near Yen Hung, approximately 90 km south of Vinh. Both structures are roughly 40 meters in length.

There is no evidence indicating that work is underway to construct new bridges on route 8 -- the only other road leading from North Vietnam into central or southern Laos. The absence of work to improve this road suggests that the North Vietnamese do not consider route 8 to be as important as routes 7 and 12 and supports the conclusion that route 8 is used only to supply the relatively few Communist forces now in the area of Lak Sao.

b. Railroad

In addition to the program to improve the road network, the North Vietnamese are continuing to work on the railroad in the southern part of the country. The rail line officially reached the Vinh area in May 1964, but construction is still in progress in Vinh on such ancillary facilities as maintenance shops for rolling stock. Construction below Vinh has reached an advanced stage on the 3-km spur to the port of Ben Thuy on the Song Ca River, but replacement of the large rail bridge over the Song Ca on the old main line extending southward has not been undertaken. Some preliminary work has been completed in preparation for possible reconstruction of a second major rail bridge below Vinh over the Ngan Pho River, and work is actively in progress on a smaller bridge located approximately 40 km south of Vinh and on the roadbed at scattered points along the 70-km section between the Ngan Pho River and the Bai Duc Thon staging area. There is no indication, however, of any construction activity along the 190-km section of the abandoned line between Bai Duc Thon and the 17th parallel.

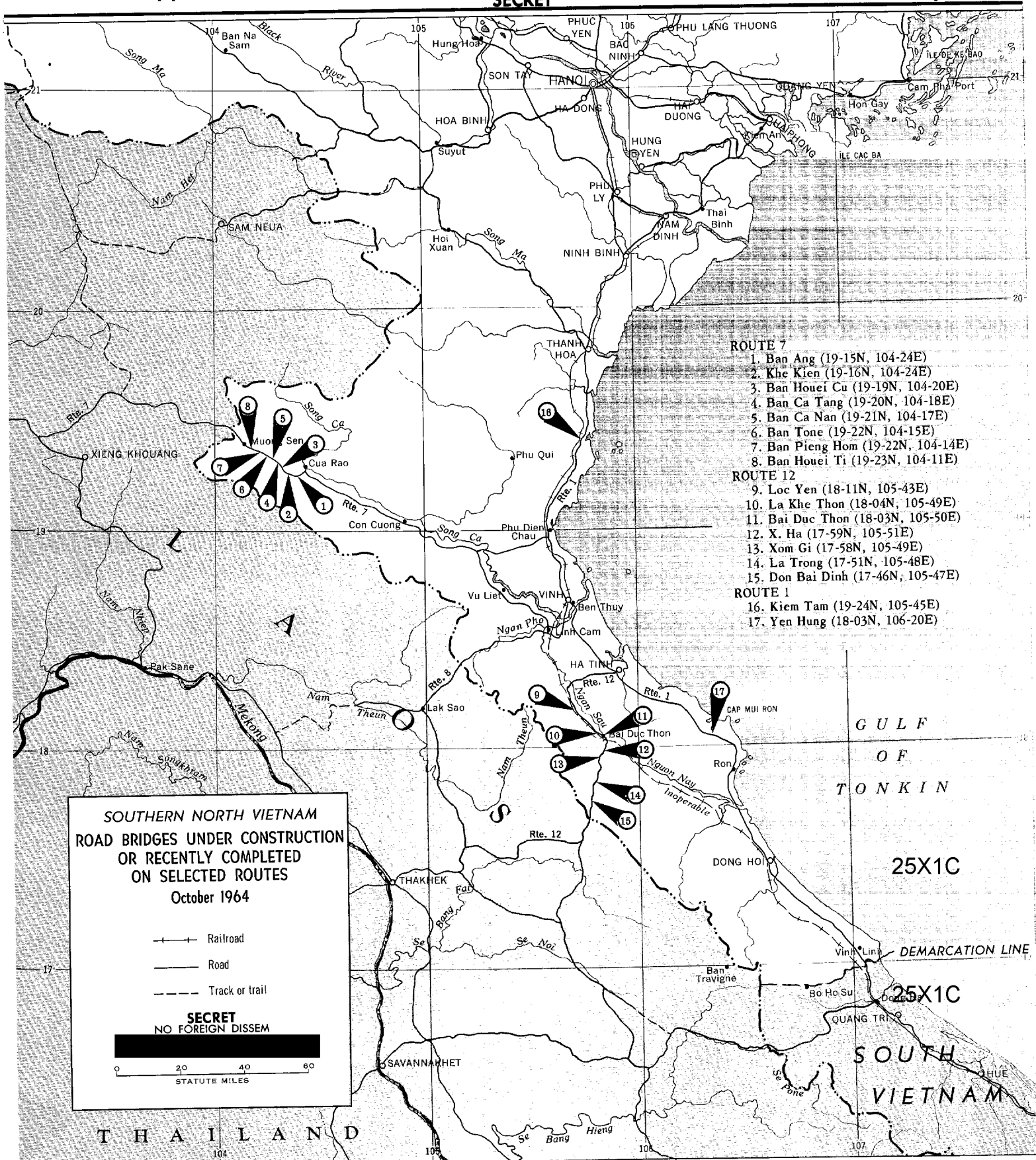
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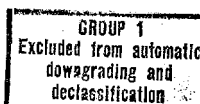
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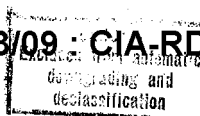
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Project No. 30.5192

Report Series CIA/RR CB 64-72

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